

in them, we discern the bent towards the practical. Erasmus was but a poor type of reformer judged from the standpoint of the crusaders who were donning their armour on all sides, at Wittenberg and elsewhere, for the battle with Antichrist. He was deficient in physical courage, in the keen-edged conviction which the friction with ecclesiastical abuses, with scholastic obscurantism, had at last produced in men like Luther and Zwingli. He could lash the lazy, stupid, self-indulgent monks with his sarcasm; he could not beard the pope and face the stake. He was not made, he confesses, to be a martyr; he would play the part of Simon Peter over again, if it came to the pinch. His scholarly tastes were, moreover, jarred by the impetuosity of the warring theologians on both sides, and, in an age in which these theologians were engaged in a fight to a finish, the utmost that he would dare was to deal an occasional thrust from behind the safe shelter of a neutral humanism. Nevertheless, he did no small service to the cause of progress. His humanism was practical, and, as far as compatible with his own safety, militant. It was not merely a means of self-culture, as in Italy. He sought to improve the Church, and even the State, as well as himself. He was the friend and fellow-worker of More and Colet, if not of Luther. He was the preacher of a rational culture which should eradicate abuses in a peaceable, gradual fashion in Church and State, diffuse a new light where obscurantist darkness reigned, raise society to a higher moral and intellectual level. He had a practical aim in view, even in composing the works of pure scholarship, which gained him his highest reputation. His Greek Testament was a mighty weapon wherewith to rout the scholastic pedants who warred against sound criticism and rational exegesis. And in his lighter works, his "Praise of Folly," his "Education of a Christian Prince," designed for the instruction of the young Charles of Burgundy, the future emperor, his "Adagia," and his "Colloquia," his aim was the improvement of human society. His success as an author enabled him to wield an enormous influence, for, in spite of the limitation which the use of the Latin language imposed, he enjoyed the rare happiness of being read as fast as he could write and print. If many editions could make a writer happy, Erasmus must